

SHIFTING GEARS

THE CHANGING MEANING OF WORK IN MASSACHUSETTS, 1920 - 1980

GARDNER, MASSACHUSETTS

INTERVIEWEE: Fred Sweeney

INTERVIEWER: Martha Norkunas

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TRANSCRIBER: Marie Drake

TAPE ONE, SIDE A

MN: Today is September 15, 1988. Now it's Fred Sweeney, but your real name isn't Fred.

FS: It's Fernand..

MN: How do you spell that.

FS: FERNAND

MN: What kind of a name is that?

FS: It's a French name. If there had been an E on the end of my name, I'd have been a girl.  
(Both laugh).

MN: Are your parents French Canadian?

FS: Yes.

MN: And where were you born?

FS: I was born in Canada. Grand Mayer Canada,,just outside of Quebec City.

MN: Grand Meyer, huh? Do you know why your family came down to Gardner?

FS: Well, my family came down to Suncook, N.H., not to Gardner originally. I've been around a little bit. I went to French school in Suncook N.H., I got in Suncook at 2 years old. They migrated to N.H., what you might say a small French town in Suncook and...

MN: Did they have relatives there?

FS: I have a few relatives there now.

MN: I mean, is that why they (Fred interrupts)

FS: Yes, they had relatives there. That's like all the people that migrated from New Brunswick and Chitiack and all those places migrated to Gardner. They had relatives here in Gardner and 90% of them went to work at Heywood Wakefield. Co. No, my folks had relatives in Suncook and that's why they went down there. And, I went to school there until, oh, I must have got

there at 2 years old, I was born in 1920, it had to be around 1922 and we moved out of Suncook in 1929. We went to Orleans VT. on a farm and I did farming for a number of years.

MN: What did they do in Suncook?

FS: My father worked in a mill in Suncook. They had bobbin mills, there, cotton mills, stuff like that, and that's what he was working at and course in 1928 when our former President Hoover got in, everything went caputs' I guess and so we moved on a farm. Then, from, well that, living in Vermont, I lived in Vermont until I was 20 years old. Farming and off the farm into the Braywood Heel Company sanding wooden heels for ladies's shoes and then in 1941, I migrated to South Ashburnham. I had friends working at Heywood and some working at Whitney's in South Ashburnham and they were up for Thanksgiving and I migrated down South Ashburnham with them.

MN: Just took a chance?

FS: Just took a chance. One week before Pearl Harbor, and incidentally, Pearl Harbor was Dec. 7, 1941. One week before Pearl Harbor, I came here in South Ashburnham and I went to work, I came down on the first of Dec., and I was working at W.F. Whitney's on the second. I got a job immediately working at W. F. Whitney's in South Ashburnham.

MN: What do they make?

FS: They make furniture there. One of the best lines of furniture in the world. They may have been second to Heywood's, I dunno, but they made a beautiful line of hardwood maple, all kinds of furniture from the bedroom to the living room and kitchens, and the works, everything, they made everything there.

MN: And what did you do there?

FS: I worked on a floor there, I was a floor boy at the time, I was only 20 years old, well 21, let's see 1920, 1941, I was 21 years old and I worked there for a year and I got drafted into the U.S. Army Airforce.

MN: What's a floor boy?

FS: A floor boy is the person that gets all the stock for the bench workers. I lined them up with all the stock that they used to assemble case goods, assemble chairs, what have you. I did other little odd jobs there lining up other stock in the stock bins and did a lot of

eventually I ended up doing some sanding and then course I went into the Airforce for 3 some odd years. Then, when I came back I went into the finishing department. I worked as a fitter.

MN: Same company?

FS: Same company, yes, I came back and went back to Heywoods. I worked uh (MN interrupts)

MN: Whitney's

FS: Whitney's, yes, I went to Whitney's back to the same company, Whitney's and there I went into the paint shop, working as the final fitter. That, I put all hardware on the finished goods, ready for shipping.

MN: So when people say that, they mean like handles on the dressers, or what do they mean the hardware on the finished goods?

FS: The pulls, ya know, the knobs or the metal hardware or decorations or glass in the glass door and the final touch on the fittings, see, you have your people in the wood shop that assemble the case and then you have your benchmen that fit the drawers and hang the doors. When they come over to the finishing department, well, some of that is taken up off the cases and sometimes they mix the drawers and you have to refit the drawers too so that they look good, so they look decent so that, and I was the final fitter, per se (laugh), for doors and drawers.

MN: Did they have to train you for that?

FS: Well, ya know, yes they train you and then you have to have it in you to be able to do the job, ya know, a lot of people don't qualify.

MN: What do you mean, you have to have it in you?

FS: Well, some people, ya know when you look at a job you always say well that isn't hard, I can do that, but until you've actually done it, you don't know the job and if ya don't take a liking to it, you never make it. You've got to have it in you to, hey, ya know, you've got to tell yourself, I like this, and if you like your job, you've got it made.

MN: And how long did you stay there.

FS: I stayed with Whitney's for 12 years.

MN: Were they unionized?

FS: They were unionized. When I came back from the Wars in 1946, I was immediately told that they had organized while I was gone and they said we do have a union here, you don't have to

joint because I was working for the company at the time and when they organize a plant, if you're already there before they organize, you don't have to join, you're like a Grandfather clause, but I could see that it would work to my advantage to be in the union because I've always liked to be out there doing things, so I, I joined right away when I came back to work.

MN: You were sympathetic to it right away too?

FS: Well, I did talk to some of the people that were there and, hey I could see when I came back that there was benefits that we didn't have when I left. I said to myself, hell, how the hell did this come about, and the guy told me we have a contract and we negotiated this because, and, and, I remember that before the War in 1941, that I had gone to VT on the day before Christmas or infact the evening, Christmas eve and I believe Christmas fell on a Wednesday at that time, and I had to come back on Thursday, had just the one day, ya know. Vacation time, ya had the fourth of July.

MN: That was it.

FS: That was it. So, there was no such thing as a week's vacation or 2 weeks vacation, no matter how much seniority you had, there was no such animal around. When I came back and they said look, you've got, already when I came back, I had 4 years seniority, My service time counted for me because I went in the service from Whitney's and I had been working a little bit over a year at Whitney's so I had established myself there, so I had 4 years seniority and I was already qualified for a week's vacation. Well, hell, that was, right there that was worth it.

MN: So that's why a lot of people will go back to their same job not for the work if they get the seniority.

FS: That's true. See like, I could have gone back to the floor job when I came back but ya know, you're a floor boy, what is there for advancement? I had a chance to get onto a job that would give me experience and would give me a chance so that if I ever did leave there, hey, I had a skill and that's what I had wanted is a skill, right away.

MN: Were there skilled and unskilled jobs and Whitney's?

FS: Oh, sure, all your, see, the only jobs that ya don't need a skill at is pushing a broom, really. Now a lot of people say that the floor boy, they call em the floor boy. If the floor boy does his job, he has a skill really, because what he's gotta do, he's gotta know that this

person that assembling the case, the case, a bureau, he needs two sides, a top, a dust panels for the drawers, and he needs 2 feet for this case, he needs X amount of pieces for that and if you're a good floor boy you can help your assembler because you get him the parts that he needs. If you're just a numb-numb, you just bring the load of stock and the guy is forever hollaring, Hey! I need this, I need that. If you're a good floor man, you have created a little skill and that's why they liked me on the floor because all the guys had to say, hey, they'd give me a number and it's okay, I go round up the stock for him. They went to work, or even like your people who fitted drawers and stuff like that, I had to make sure they had the right drawer guides, now the benchman had to put in their own drawer guides because sometimes even when you're assembling drawers on a press, they vary a little bit, everything's not always square, this is wood we're working with, so therefore, it was all put in there by machine, sometimes the drawer wouldn't even go in the hole where it was supposed to, but if the guy puts his own, if he sets in in with glue, lets it set a little bit, then puts the screws in, then that was half the battle. Like I said, every, like I said even, well maybe even the floor boy's gotta have a skill because he's gotta know how to sweep, but he has,, some are more skilled than others.

MN: And people at the plant had a sense of who was the skilled worker and who wasn't.

FS: Definitely, definitely.

MN: Did they think of themselves as craftsmen?

FS: I believe they did, yes. Because, ya know, an assembler is not a drawfish. The assembler is like the man that builds your house. You've got your rough carpenter and your finish carpenter. You've got your man that puts on plaster and the guy that puts on wallboard, ya know. And of course ya know your painter covers many, many sins.

MN: Mm, Hmm. So, there would be, because ya know, it seems to me a craftsman is somebody who makes the whole chair.

FS: Well, see, that's uh, well, years ago that's what they used to do, but then they, somebody invented piece work, I don't know who the hell it was (both laugh), but anyways, when ya do piece work, if ya do only a certain section of the chair per se, let's say you're doing the bases, when ya don't get so many parts and ya get used to handling those same parts

and ya speed up, but if you're doing the whole chair, ya got so many components that, oh, you're putting out a good product and quite a few pieces, but if you have it in sections, it goes a lot faster.

MN: But do ya still feel connected to the chair?

FS: Oh definitely, ya still feel connected to the chair, yea. You feel that, well, I did that, ya know.

MN: So, it seems to me too Fred that a lot of the union in the Gardner area came in during WWII. Is that true?

FS: That's right, that's true.

MN: Why so?

FS: Ya know, that's hard to say, I dunno. Course, unions were born many, many years ago. They took away the child labor and a lotta things like that. Used to have kids 6, 7, 8 years old working hours and hours in factories for peanuts, and hey, the parents had to let them work because there was nothing else, the wages were so low, they had to live. A lot of people worked in cellar holes or old barns, stuff like that, unsafe places and as the people got educated, the unions were born. Tells ya that in the bible, united you stand and you've got to unite. Ya can't just hold on by yourself. Even our Pope says a man should belong to the union. Unification is the name of the game because ya know, its like at a football game. There's 30,000 to 40,000 people there and you get up and you hollar. One person, who hears ya? 8 people around you, but if that 30,000 jump up and they hollar, they hear you in the next county. That's unification, ya know, they all get up and scream like hell and you can get more done by that way as long as it's done orderly, ya can't just be running all over the place.

MN: And is there some kind of, does the union assume that there will always be a conflict between mangement and a worker?, that there is an opposite side?

FS: Well, yes, I think so because the way I feel. Here's the way my personal feeling is. Where there's a union, the company is a better provider. The reason for that is that when you have a signed contract, you have dates in there when a certain thing's going to happen, like an increase in pay, you have a 2-year contract. You've got a contract that says, it was signed September 15, today, okay? Now if you sign a 2-year contract, you know, the employer

knows that September 15, 1989 if you've negotiated an increase in wages, or whatever other benefits that on September 15, 1989 that's gonna take place. So, therefore, they prepare for it ahead of time. And it goes over very smoothly, and your people are more relaxed because they know they're gonna get it, they don't have to worry about it, so they produce more, infact, it's a proven thing that a union person produces more than a non-union person.

MN: Really?

FS: Yuh, that's in statistics. It's been proven that they're better and work more because they don't have that feeling that maybe the boss is gonna come along and say, hey, I don't want you on this job, I want this fellow here, he's a friend of mine. We were out drinking last night and he needs a job, see, a union person, you have a seniority clause in your contract. If you're doing the job, that's your job, you have a home base per se. Without a union, you don't have nothin. Even if you're in management they can push you around, that's being done now. But, it's the security that you have as a union person, the dignity. Ya see, the company can't come and jump all over you for nothing. If you deserve it, I'll go along with them, but you have a right to fair representation, ya don't have to worry that, well, if the boss comes over and says hey, move down the floor, go do this, go do that, you have to do what the boss tells ya, don't get me wrong, you can't refuse really, but you can fight back, by that I mean you can say hey, look, now this is my job, that isn't and I'm going to file a grievance if I have to. You have your stewards in the shop and if you can't straighten out your problem with your foreman, you talk to your steward, he talks to your foreman and if they can't get it done that way, there's a grievance procedure where without a union there's no such thing. They just say, Hey, down the road Mack. Ya don't like it, get out. They tell ya that now but you don't have to because ya know you've got something to fight with ya know, you get representation. And with a union, like I said before you've got your vacation, holidays, better wages, like I said security, insurance, pensions, ya know, all the companies have that but they don't have the security, they have pensions, but wages in companies that don't have no unions, they have good wages, good pensions, good insurance, but ya don't have that representation, the average person needs.

MN: Do they care really about security? U .

FS: People are funny (laugh) ya know, you hear that all the time, people are funny. People will bitch when they pay their dues but when it's explained to them what their dues cost them, they kind of reflect and kind of smile a little bit, but everytime ya take the dues out, ya know, goddamn dues again, but our dues right now ar \$13.00 a month, that's less than .10 an hour, that's if you're working on the average of 40 hours a week. If you're working more, it's even less than .9 an hour, ya know. And, for that price, hey, ya know, for \$13.00 a month, when you negotiate a contract of late of the last 7-8 or 10 years, we've never gotten less than a quarter an hour increase plus other benefits. So, ya know, I'll take \$40.00 a month anytime and give ya \$13, ya wanna do that, hey, I'll raise ya right now.

MN: Why is the .(\*\*\*-----unintelligible) so antagonistic to the uh

FS: Well, I'll tell ya why. Because they don't have the whole say. See, if they think you've crossed em, with no union, they just tell ya, hey, get out. You don't have a chance to defend yourself.

MN: But they think it's their right to tell you to get lost because it's their company.

FS: That's right, that's what they think, but ya know we're selling our labors to them. If it wasn't for us, they wouldn't be there either. They've gotta realize that and I think some of them do. I have good relationship with the companies in the area. I've been working at this now for 14 years and hey, we don't always see eye to eye, course not, but we get along fine. We can iron out most of our problems without arbitration, I respect them, they resepect me. I don't like you, if I have a grievance, I'll push it, and they know it. If I don't have one, hey I have to represent my people, we'll talk about it. If the company can prove to me that they're right, I will show my person that's the employee there that, hey, the company has a right to, and I always tell em that, I always tell people that just because ya joined the union it doesn't mean that ya don't have to do your job any more. You still have to do your job. You've got to give a fair day's work for a fair day's pay. That's the way I go. And another thing too that people don't stop to think a lotta times is that with the union, the companies have to be a little bit more on their toes for the safety factor, although without a union you can still write to OSHA, but nobody would dare to because if they ever got found out, it'd be thrown out, but with a union, hey, if they have safety committees that are supposed to go around to 2-3 of each of the employees and of management, sometimes they adhere to that



program, sometimes they don't but ya know, we tell em that they've gotta keep it where it's a safety place to work.

MN: I've heard over and over again in Gardner that a place like Simplex is crazy to keep the union out.

FS: That's only because they want to have the last word. They'll go all out to keep the union out, yes, because you could see in the paper this afternoon 130 people laid off or discharged from Simplex. Nothing the people can do about it whether they've been there 10 years, 20 years, the company can say you're done, you're gone, where with the union you have to go by seniority or at least job classification. The companies are getting job classification and years ago it used to be just seniority. Now, they've got job classification which, I think its a good policy because if a person that's worked out in the yard for 20 years, never worked in a paint shop, he's not that good of a person to work in the paint shop. True, he might be able to learn the job, but sometimes it takes quite a while to learn a job and that's costly. So, I sympathize with the companies on those points, but when they're just doing it to replace somebody, then that's wrong.

MN: Especially to replace someone whose coming years are retirement and they don't want to pay their retirement.

FS: That happens, that happened at Heywood's. They laid off a lady over there that had 3 months to go to be vested in the 10 years and they let her go and course, they were on their way out so there really wasn't anything I could do as a union rep to have em hold her there, ya know. But I think if they'd had a little bit of heart, they could've placed her somewhere pushing a broom or taking inventory or something just to keep her 3 months but they didn't. They just let her go and that was wrong. Like I said, we had the union brought in pensions, brought in insurance, medical insurance, life insurance. Like life insurance at Heywood Wakefield's, they shafted the people over there because they had life insurance policy that they claimed was paid up, they had parties for these people that retired, they even gave them a paper saying this is your paid up policy. They gave them a chair when they retired, some of them and oh, everybody was happy, they had nice big party. Low and behold in 1979 when the plant closed, they didn't tell them that that policy died with them. They didn't even notify them that they weren't paying on that policy, well what happened, they had a deal with the insurance company that they

were paying for that policy, the people didn't have to pay any more towards it or anything, but when they closed, they didn't tell them, hey we stopped paying, so these people hadn't been for the union. I found out that all these people had lost their policy, so I called, I checked with the insurance company and I said how about making some kind of a deal so that these people can at least pick it up themselves and keep this thousand dollars. Well, I worked it out and I told the people, I put an add in the paper and a notice in the window there in the office. A lot of these people came ~~in~~ and they said, oh now, we've got it, they told us, one guy came in and said I've got a chair to prove it. Well you've got the chair, they're not taking that back but you don't have no policy unless you pay for it. Some of the people went to see attorneys, about it and the attorney said no there's nothing you can do about it, it's the way the policy is written up. As long as the company had a contract, they were obligated to pay, but when we didn't have any more union contract when they closed the door, they lost their policy. I had a lot of people who had picked up up on their own and a lot of them just said, well the hell with it, I can't afford it, they just thought they had it, ya know.

MN: And could you force the company to reinstitute it?

FS: No, no couldn't do it. We checked with attorneys and they said no.

MN: They had to end up paying the pension plan, didn't they?

FS: Well, yea, that there, that pension plan they came under arisa-----unintelligible) on that, ya know that the government forced them to insure their pension plan.

MN: They came under a what?

FS: Arisa, A-R-I-S-A. That there they had to insure the pension plan through the government so they didn't lose it and even today, I still handle the pension for Heywood's, not Heywood's, Heywoods, when they closed the plant, they were done with it, but practically every week I called Washington D.C. to the PBGC, the Pension Benefit, Guaranteed Corporation, that somebody's got a pension coming, they sent me the papers, the people would come in the office and we'd fill them out, I'd notarize them, send them back and they'd get their pension, Heywood doesn't do that.

MN: Even now are there many people you do that for?

FS: Yea, anybody that's qualified, anybody that worked at Heywoods that's had at least 15 years that their contract called for, that their plan called for. They'll come in here even

if they didn't have 15 years, I'll still write to the PBGC and see if they do have some type of program to take care of these people, no Heywood's didn't do that. The union did it and is still doing it.

MN: And Heywoods was willing to just drop it.

FS: They just dropped it, period. They could have cared less. They did good. I'm not going to say they did not good because a lot of people lived that worked at Heywood Wakefield. They made a living. You get used to living with X amount of dollars and at one time back in 1940 in the early years, if anybody worked at Heywood's they thought they were on top of the world. That's a fact. I heard that when I moved from VT. A guy told me, don't work at Whitney's, go to Heywood's, you'll have it made. But, I never made it that far, I got a job right away in South Ashburnham, W.F. Whitney's.

MN: They had such a good reputation?

FS: That's right, yea.

MN: You saw good it was to the workers?

FS: Yea, well see it was the biggest chair factory in Gardner and anybody who worked at Heywood's, hey, hey I worked at Heywoods, oh boy, you're alright ya know.. But, like I said

TAPE ONE SIDE B

ya know the uh, the company kept that amount of people but ya like like I said they had everybody as a number. They didn't know anybody by their first names, well maybe a few, but.

MN: Who?

FS: The employees. They were just a number up there.

MN: At Heywood's?

FS: Yea, until the union came in. They after that,, they began to realize that they were people, not just number 39, he works on a trip saw, get him out of there, I've got a friend of mine that's coming in.. After that, number 39 was Philip Johnson, ya know. Had a number with, had a name with that number, so they, they started to respect their people a little bit more, and ya know everybody said the union drove Heywood's out of Gardner.

MN: Yea, I heard that story often.

FS: Not true. Heywood's drove Heywood's out of Gardner. They had more chiefs than Indians at

Heywood's. By that, I mean, more salary people than they had regular people. I know one guy, a personal friend of mine, I won't name him, he was a salary person, drawing big money and he had 2 people working for him, now that don't make sense. Because, I don't believe that 2 people could make up his wages and theirs and make profit for Heywood Wakefield. Another thing that Heywood's used to do in the latter years, they'd get a new product, a new chair or a new design and they would work all the bugs out of it, by that, they would make all the jigs, everything to assemble the piece so that okay on the next cutting, this thing here would just fall together, then they'd farm that piece out to N.Y., to another plant or into Canada or down to F.A. Nichols, the plant that they opened up on West Broadway. The main plant did all the experimenting and that's an awful lot of cost. But when it came to be able to turn over a profit on this item, it was gone. All the best pieces of eye they took out and gave it to somebody else.

MN: Why did they do that?

FS: For whatever reason, they felt that they probably could get it done cheaper because the other plants weren't unionized. And then they went down the drain. So, ya know, they did themselves in. There was like I said, too many chiefs and not enough Indians.

MN: So it wasn't the demands that the union made on them all the time.

FS: No, no, no, because the union wasn't that foolish to ask for more than what they could get. They asked for a fair wage for the area. Heywood Wakefield wasn't the highest paying company in Gardner. A lot of people thought that, infact, I had a man that came down here that had worked at Heywood's for 47 years and he came down and talked to me, this was probably about 5 years ago. I told him, I said, ya know, you worked for practically nothing at Heywood's, I said, I'll bet you that you've got a hell of a lot better job now. He said yes, he said I never realized that. And I had told him that back in 1977, that Heywood wasn't the best paying place and he didn't believe me, but he believes me now. But, ya know, you get set in a place, you know the people around you, so you say, well, this is where I have to work. So if you're earing 4.75 an hour, you really can't afford to take an afternoon off to go look for a job that's going to pay 5.25, ya know, or maybe a little bit more. So you stay there, because people get set in their ways and they get accustomed to living with the money they bring in because I know, I've lived in, I went from on job to another, I received

a dollar increase and when I got home, my wife said boy, is this nice and ya know the first couple of weeks, she said hey we've got some money left over. After 2 weeks, we didn't have any more left over, we got used to living with what came in, so, we're all the same, we just stay there.

MN: Another thing, when, let's go back a minute to WWII. Somebody told me that the reason the union came in was they were afraid people would strike and the government didn't want anyone to strike during the war so they encouraged the unions to come into the companies.

FS: I never heard that, I know they were doing some war work, I would've thought it would have been the other way around. But, well, I've never heard that one.

MN: Because it seems like this area was late to unionize, like Lowell and Lawrence.

FS: They were late.

MN: They unionized so long before.

FS: Yuh, yea.

MN: Why so?

FS: I dunno, I guess for what ever reason, maybe the people never got around to coming into the wood factories, here, but ya know, you've got, well at one time you'd hear about 100 different factories, everybody started a furniture plant in their garage, back bedroom or someplace. A lot of families started up manufacturing chairs, ya know, they'd have 3 or 4 kids, child labor was gone as far as hiring kids so they had their own kids working with them and some of them made out alright and they grew from the woodshed, built an addition and then they made it go. Like I said, Heywood's, yes a lot of people made their living at Heywoods, hey, ya know, you made do with what you've got, some make due with a lot less than others.

MN: But isn't the younger generation now different, because the big problem with trying to get workers to stay, in the old times they would lay them off here and there, and people were dying to have their jobs,, but now they can't get them to stay.

FS: That's true, the younger people maybe its because there's food stamps and Welfare and whatever, there is out there, its pretty hard to have anybody stay into a plant that's less than say 30 years old. that will stay 4-5 years. They're always looking for either something better, or just looking to take time off, (laugh) I don't know what it is.

MN: So they didn't have the same work habits as their parents?

FS: No, no, that's gone, that's gone. They don't have the same, I believe it might be the responsibility, they don't feel that they have the responsibility. The world is changing, I don't know if its for the better either (laugh).

MN: People at the companies today complain that they just can't get workers.

FS: Today, if you want a job, there's a job around the corner. Whether it pays really that well or not, you can walk out of a plant today at 7:05 and at 8:05 be working somewhere else, but are you really better off? Today's people, don't want to take any crap, from anybody, because they give it (laugh), so ya know, but I dunno, it's hard to say why people don't want to stay anywhere, they just seem to be unsatisfied all the time.

MN: Are the conditions so different?

FS: Most of your plants, ya know a person will go to work somewhere, if they really have to go to work,,not just on their own choice sometimes, you have some bills to pay so you get a job and after you've been there for a little bit you say, I'm not gonna stay in this place very long, and sometimes they don't. They'll go somewhere else. Then they find that the same thing's happening there at the new place as was happening at the old place, so they've all got their good and bad points, all the plants, they're all the same. They're people.

MN: And the kinds of complaints the workers have about the furniture factories, have those changed since you've been around in 14 years.

FS: Not really, not really, it's, people have the same complaints, the rates are too low, or well I work in an area that's not vented enough or the complaints are still there, they don't change. Gotta have better wages and better benefits, but ya have that all over, even your non-union shops. Course, the non-union shops are keeping up with the union shops because that way if they don't somebody would come over and see us and say organize us. But as long as they're making the wages, they feels that they don't need the union until they get fired and then they come down and see us but it's too late. The other shops have benefits, like they have seniority, they call it seniority. They have pensions, they have medical insurance, all that stuff, but these people don't realize that the company could change their programs without any notice where with the union you've got to give a notice. that we're thinking of changing the pension plan, we're thinking of having somebody else carry it or the insurance, we're going to

have somebody else be our insurer, we're notified about it. We had one that happened this summer, kind of cute in a way. I had one of my chairmen call me up and say, hey Temple Stuarts gave all their people the afternoon off yesterday. It was real hot, 100 and some odd I guess. I said oh yea, and this gal said yup, all their people got the time off, our company didn't do that. So I said, did any of our people go home. She said yea, a few went home. I said and some stayed. She said yea. I said then they had a choice didn't they. She said yea, that's true really. I said Temple Stuart's, did they pay their people for going home? She said no. I said did the people have a choice? She said no. I said, so there you are. I said, you people could've gone home if you'd wanted to. You had the option of staying and earning an afternoon's pay or going home with no pay. But I said, Temple Stuart's if their people had gone home on their own, they could have been fired, but the plant closed, they had no choice. So, there is a little bit of difference.

MN: Is Temple Stuart unionized.

FS: No, no (laugh), Temple Stuart's not unionized.

MN: And the union would have found them something, just closing the plant?

FS: Oh yes, if they'd have closed the plant on account of the heat, we'd have had a bunch of grievances come in and we'd have had to take them up because ya know, like we came in here and you said it was kind of warm, okay. In the other office it was comfortable and say that we just said, hey, we can't have this session today, it's too damn warm. I said we're closing the office. That gal over there would've said, what for, I'm comfortable here. So, there is an option where there is a union. With no union, no option.

MN: Fred, let's go back a little bit, you said you worked at Whitney's for 12 years.

FS: Yes.

MN: Then, during that time when you came back from the war the union had already come in to Whitney's.

FS: Right, yea.

MN: And you saw a lot of changes?

FS: I saw a lot of changes there, yes, I saw that the people. Ya know, it's funny, where there's a union, when the union organizes a plant, it's like taking a yolk off your shoulders, ya know. You feel relaxed. You're not tense all the time and you hear these people say, I don't need the

union to keep my job. That may be so until the boss comes in with a personal friend and says He's taking your job. And that happened before. A personal friend or your son or daughter or your brother-in-law or sister-in-law. Ya know, if you're the boss and your brother-in-law is not working, his wife's gonna get after your wife and they're gonna say, Jesus, John needs a job, we've got 3 kids. So I'm the boss what am I going to do, say the hell with him? I'm gonna say hey what can I do, I've got a good man on the job, but he's my flesh and blood, so you just push this guy out, but your brother-in-law with the union the guy would say, got a union, my hands are tied and ya know he wouldn't be lying and he would feel comfortable about it. The other way he gets the pressure from his brother-in-law, sister-in-law, and his wife. Jesus Christ, what the hell am I going to do now, ya know, even if he likes this guy and this guy is doing a good job, he's still gotta get rid of him.

MN: So sometimes the foremen and supervisors like the union also.

FS: They do, they do because it makes their job much easier, because ya see, your steward, your union when we sign a contract, we agree to the contract, the contract is a guideline. We agree to what's there. We agree to a full day's work. We agree to be at work on time. We agree to take the breaks when they're due us, now ya know, we're part of that contract so let's say that I've got 3-4 people that keep coming in late. There are provisions in the contract that if a guy comes in X amount of times late, ya give him a warning. You don't just say, hey, we don't need you any more, get out. There's a procedure, you go by the procedure. We have no problems at all, ya know. Sometimes if they don't go by procedure, then we have a problem and have to go to arbitration and beat em and we do ya know, but, and like I said it makes it so much easier for everybody and yes the foremens like the union because if somebody's not doing their job, they'll go to their steward and say, hey, first they'll talk to the guy, they should anyways. I used to. I was a foreman for 10 years, I know.

MN: Is that after Whitney's?

FS: Yes, after Whitney's, I left Whitney's and I became a foreman in another shop.

MN: In which shop?

FS: In Arlington Chair, then Arlington Chair closed and I went to Thayer Furniture, I was foreman up there and ya know, if you treat people like people, they were unionized up there where



I went.

MN: At Thayer or...:

FS: At Arlington Chair and Thayer's, they were unionized and I became a foreman over there and I treated people like I wanted to be treated at Whitney's which I wasn't at Whitney's the last few years, that's why I got out of there. So anyways, your foreman, he'll talk with the person. If he can't get anywhere, he'll talk to the steward in the department and say, hey, ya know, that Jimmy there, Jimmy's kinda screwing us up here. Ya know, when you're a foreman, if somebody keeps coming in late, ya know, you can't plan your work because if I've gotta shift you over to this girl's job, then this girl comes in 20 minutes later and you've done part of the job, now this one comes in, she's got part of your work and everything's all screwed up, so finally you say, hey, let's get it squared away. Now, if she can't come in on time, hey the company has a right to replace them, ya know. There's no such thing as you can't. You go by the book. You can replace just ~~about~~ anybody if they're screwing up. If they're doing their job, then you have no complaints, but if they're not, infact, when I was a foreman, I got rid of the assistant shop chairman, now that's pretty hard to do but I got rid of him.

MN: Who's he? Above you or below you.

FS: Well, he was a second man in the union and I was the foreman, see, so he had quite a lot of authority, but he screwed up, I told him about it, it didn't change his way of doing things. I fired him. Went to arbitration and I beat him, because I went by the contract. The only ~~reason~~ reason, I went by the contract and like I said, it makes a company better to have a union because they have a guideline to go by. Like I said before, they know when they're going to have to be paying out more money to their people, so they make arrangements, ya know, the money comes from increase in the price of their furniture. That's the only thing and ya know even if the union were to say, there are no more unions from now on, that wouldn't drop the prices at all, not at all, because it doesn't work that way. And like I said the non-union plants, they tried to keep up as far as wages, benefits and stuff like that but the people do not have the say or the representation that a union person has.

MN: Were you a union representative when you worked at Thayer?

FS: No, I was a foreman, I was management.

MN: But can(----- )

FS: No, I was management then.

MN: Then what happened? How long were you at Thayer?

FS: Ten years.

MN: And then what happened.

FS: Then, I left Thayer and I went to Winchendon Furniture as a foreman for about a year and then I said it's not working out. They were working the butt off of me. (Laugh). They gave me a skeleton crew and they give me 6 men wanting me to get out the work of 10, I couldn't do it, so I said no.. No, instead of letting me quit, they let me go back on the bench as a worker because I had been more or less like a cabinet maker at Whitney's. When I left I was the final drawer fitter and door hanger. So they knew I could do the job, so they hired me as that. Then, I left that after, let's see, about 5 years. I became an organizer here for a little over a year, then I went into the International. I worked for the International Union and in '76 I ran for this office as business manager and I've been here since.

MN: Weren't you debating about becoming an organizer.

FS: Yea, yes.

MN: About '74.

FS: 73 or 74 yes.

MN: What did you have to do.

FS: Go around to different shops to, that were, we'd get, ya know we'd get calls here all the time of people that were having problems at the shop, so when we hear that, we go and interview the people and see if we could get the organized. Ya know, it's funny and some night it made me feel awful but I spent the money on organizing but then when you reflect and think of what happened, I had in less than a year I had 5 campaigns, I had 5 elections and I lost them all, but I saw the change in the companies that benefited the people so much in the time that I was working to organize those shops that ya know, although they didn't get a union, they got the benefits, and like I said at first it kind of hurt me to think that Jesus, I put

in all that time and spent the money and everything and we got nothing, we didn't really, we did get something, those people got more benefits,, a little bit more to save out of it and hey, they really benefitted, but ya know, they still voted no (laugh) because the company had them as a captive audience before they voted and well ya know, the union can't do this and the union can't do that and the people believed them. A couple of those plants now backed down, they've called today, you've gotta come up and organize us. I said yea, we'll be there when you people send me down 6-7 people to talk to me here. They haven't done it, they thought I was going to run right up there and make some more changes for them, ya know, there's only so much you can do.

MN: Yea, you always see these movies where we organize -----

FS: Well, ya know, back in the early days, the union was run with a baseball bat and a tire iron, ya see, but today, they're run with a brief case and a 3-piece suit. That's the way to go now, see, years ago they busted heads, now you sit down and you talk intelligently to them and we make sense.

MN: I guess a tire iron on both sides, the company and the union, huh?

FS: In those days, yea (laugh). Well, like you said, down South though they still have some bad ones that, they have guns and dogs and everything down there. They're rough out there. This part of the country's not that bad but they used to have some rough times.

MN: You didn't have that in Gardner?

FS: Well, not really. We didn't have no real real bad ones here.

MN: Are there troubles that are sort of specific to the furniture industry?

FS: No, the only trouble that we've got is its the lowest paying industry that we have. Everything else pays more but ...

MN: Like if you get together with somebody who organizes, textile workers or somebody else who organizes, automobile plant workers, do you have different kinds of problems because you're working with furniture workers?

FS: Not really, it's all the problems are wages, benefits, pensions and ya know, like, like furniture workers or teamsters, there's no law that says you can't go into some other line of industry to organize, well like out back here, Gem Industries, that's more steel than anything

else now, they make bed springs and stuff like that, but it doesn't stop us from having them. Way, way back if you were furniture, you had furniture, period. Somebody else had a clothing store or something, that's all you had, but then that was lifted a number of years ago so if nobody stops ya, we could go organize McDonald's if the people want to organize or the nurses, it doesn't make any difference. If they call us, we'll go and a lot of people say, well go anyways, but my feeling is this. If the people are satisfied, why stir them up. Ya know, if the company treats you right, you're not so subject to want a union, although you would benefit from it. Because, you would have a say in what's going on. You would have the seniority that you don't have. There are a couple of plants that I know of that people have worked on a job for 40 some odd years and then if you work 40 years on the job and you started off at 16 or 20, you're already 60 years old, you start slowing down and they couldn't keep up with the production, so they let em go, put somebody else on their job. With the union, now, they'd have said wait a minute here, there a man that's given you his life, find him a job, ya know. They just said, hey, ya know, you can't meet the required production schedule, we don't need you any more. That's not right. I believe that way, way back, probably in the 20s when the chair factories started to grow here, I think that the people that started them had a feeling, they probably went to school with the people who were working with them and they had a closer relation with them so they wouldn't just let them go, but now all these people that run these plants, its all hand me down, see if its handed down to them from their parents, so what the hell (laugh), they don't have no feeling, just for the buck.

MN: I was exactly going to ask you that, if the fact that these are family owned businesses, instead of somebody, a lot of them are, right, then that's not unique to Gardner but that's something special about Gardner. Does that make them closer or more responsive, or...

FS: The old man probably was closer, but the next generation, they were just looking for the dollar. A lot of them, oh, they'll tell ya, they worked out in thà plant for a long while to get a feel of what it was but it's not the same, when I've got \$100 in my pocket and I have to go to Worcester, hey, it doesn't bother me. But when I've only got \$10 it bothers me a little bit because, ya know, I might get stranded down Worcester, where the hell do I go with \$10. So, the kids that run these plants now, I say kids, young men, sure they went out

in the plant and they worked a little while to get their hands and clothes dirty to see how it was, but they didn't stay there for years and years and depend on that money to make a living, because they had the resources back there, see, that's the difference.

MN: Didn't in the olden times, I don't know if this happens today, but wasn't there a real feeling of paternalism, like they tried to create the feeling, at Heywood Wakefield, I think this is true, that Richard Greenwood tried to create the idea that he was sort of the father of everybody and then they had a social club and he would go and talk to people and then they had this company newspaper, well, someone again said to me that they specifically forbade any union news to be in the company newspaper. Once in a while it slipped in, but the company management could voice their point of view.

FS: They controlled their opinion.

MN: But, they tried to create the impression of being in a family.

FS: Yea, yea, they did that.

MN: Was that directed, I mean did that help the people, did people like that, was that...

FS: No, I think the people couldn't really express themselves, ya know, and like you said, they had functions and these people went there because they were afraid if they didn't go, they'd be blackballed Monday morning. If Heywood's put on a party for them and you didn't show up, Monday morning, they'd come over and say why didn't you show up, how come you didn't come to that party, that was for you, ya know and ya know, a lot of people thought that this was great, better than having a union, better than a lot of little things but ya know those parties, there's a company I know even right now they have a nice Christmas party for everybody at the plant, okay, so the Christmas party costs them probably about now probably costs them \$50 a couple, see, for an evening of celebration, but ya know, if these people would only think that a nickel raise would be worth that \$50 see, but people don't think of that.

MN: Well, some people would say to me, I don't know why Heywood Wakefield started a newspaper, I wish they'd give us the money instead.

FS: Yea, yea, because they could see why all this garbage here, they're just telling us what they want us to hear, they're not listening.

TAPE TWO SIDE A

MN: ----- newspapers, social clubs and today I think some companies are thinking about starting up social clubs and newspapers.

FS: Some of them, well even some of our companies that have union have social clubs. Hey, they have a good time, they all work together. The people pay X amount of dollars every year towards it taken out of they pay, or they take it as a deduction, people never see it, all they've gotta do is sign up and say yes I want the ----- . If they had to take it out of their pocket, they probably would quit but when you don't see the buck it doesn't hurt you. And, they have some nice parties, sure, I'll grant ya that, but these people, they're putting that money in there themselves, but, no, personally, I think it's a good thing that the unions did come in because ya know even some of our great presidents, anybody that says they like labor and they don't care for unions are lying. Infact, it was Lincoln that said that, I believe and Roosevelt said if he ever went to work in a shop that's what he'd look for the unions first because you have a voice in what's going on. Without it you don't have nothing. When you have a signed contract, you have a document there as a guideline and ya know that's beautiful. You still have to do your job, don't get me wrong, you still have to do your job but you do have fair representation. You can walk in there and ya can say good morning to the boss and if he's got a hair across his lip, it doesn't make a bit of difference. If he doesn't want to say it to you, fine, but at least you can go hi and feel relaxed, ya know. With a contract one of the benefits that's good, if you go to the shop to work and there's no work and they send ya home, they've gotta pay you for 4 hours. Where where there's no union, the guy meets ya at the door or you've been there for an hour and a half already, he walks up there and says punch out, there's no more work the rest of the day. You get nothing, you just get hour hour and a half. If there's a union they can't do that. They have to give you a 2-hour notice. If ya work till 9:00 and they find that they ran out of stock for whatever reason or if a machine breaks down or something, this an act of God, okay, we have that in the contract. If the dam breaks up above there and the water's coming through like crazy, hey, they can't give ya a 2 hour notice, they just say hey, before the corner of the shop is undermine and the thing goes down, let's get out of here before anybody gets hurt, okay, fine, but if they just happen to run out of stock or

something, somebody screwed up somewhere, at 9:00 they say, hey, no work this afternoon, sorry, ran out of stock. Okay, so the guy works the rest of the morning, he's had his 2-hour notice, at least he knows, but where there's no union, down the road Mack (laugh).

MN: And do people realize this because a lot of people...

FS: Well see that's it, see the people, see you have some people that are followers, ya know, they'll just follow. You have people that are leaders and they should know, like we have a training session, infact tomorrow afternoon we're going to have a training session right here for our stewards at one of the plants to educate them in what's going on, how to handle their contract. Each contract is different. I have 8 shops that I represent now and I've got 8 different contracts. Now, I've gotta familiarize myself with all these contracts. If somebody calls up and says I'm having a problem, grab that contract and say what's the problem about? and tell me, okay, then I can go zip, zip, zip, okay, because each one is different, so it makes this job interesting.

MN: Challenging, yea, but again, they don't always realize that the union does help them.

FS: No, because, ya see, they're in their on little cacoon. Ya see, they're in their own little shop, they don't realize that it's helping that much. They think that out of the company's heart, ya know, the company out of their heart they'd give us all this, because they look at Temple Stuarts or they look at some other plant that don't have no union, say Simplex has given them these things but little do they raelize that the top man could come in this afternoon and say we're stopping your insurance. Hey, how come? Can't afford it any more. Or you're not going to get Veteran's Day off this year. Or, you're not gonna get the day after Thanksgiving off this year. We've got a lot of production and we can't afford to give you the time off. What they going to do about it? Scream and hollar but they'll be there to work Friday morning, I'll tell ya, because if they don't they're fired. The company can fire them. But, our people, like I had a couple shops last year that had a lot of work at Thanksgiving time. They called me in in the committee of the shop and said look, we have so much work that we've gotta get out, we would like to trade a day off. I said what do you want. They said, we would like to trade Veteran's day and the Friday after Thanksgiving for a couple days later down the line. But we hated to trade Veteran's day because only because of Veterans that we have and the freedom that we have or the little freedom we have. The day after

Thanksgiving, it cut into a long weekend, that's all that does, only cuts into a long weekend. Committee was there, I said let's think on it. We'll pool our people, we can't just do it like that, we'll check with our people how they feel.

MN: Do you check with the stewards.

FS: We check first with our stewards. The committee's the stewards see. We bring it up to them, then we check with our people in the plant. The stewards don't decide and say, yea that's what we're gonna do.

MN: Will they take a vote?

FS: We take a vote, and majority rules. Of course, you always have no way are we gonna change this, but hey, that's the democratic way. That's the way we are. So, it turned out that the company had said they had a lot of work and they were working over time so the people knew they weren't lying so they said well we can take it any time after the first of the year? Yea. You can take your 2 days or and a lot of people began to think, well we don't have the day off after the first of the year until, hey that'll be good, we'll take a couple days, fine, it worked, we worked it out, but if there'd been no union there, the company would've said we're taking those 2 days away and we don't have to give it back to you, gone ya know. So, those are all benefits like you said, do these people realize that, not really. Ya know, people will say, what the hell has the union done for me, what's it doing for me except taking my dues? And I'll always tell them, have you got a contract? And they say yea. Well, I'll say read your contract, see what it's done for you today. It's right there in that contract. It's right there in that contract. Because what's in that contract helps them every day that they work. Every day of their lives. It's there, it's for them.

MN: What about changes in the factory, like I understood at one point in 1940 lets say, Heywood Wakefield got this conveyor belt and then they had different kind of, where people worked on piece work. They would have these timers come in and set rates, etc. and that always generates a certain amount of grivences.

FS: Mm hmm.

MN: Was that a problem in a lot of the plants? This whole piece work and timing thing.

FS: Whoever you make a change. Do you have any children besides the ones -----

MN: Yes.



FS: You have. Hey, you should know. Whenever you make a change at the house, they rebell a little bit, right? Factories are the same way. Whenever the company says, after they've had their engineers go through and look at this and look at that, they say now, instead of having this guy here travel with this case down to that end of the room pushing it and come back and then take another one and go back, we're gonna put a conveyer here. All he's got to do is drop it on the conveyer and that piece goes by itself. We'll save X amount of mileage. We'll save X amount of dollars. Well, the minute they do that, this guy starts to bitch. Now, I'm going to have to work harder. How does he figure he's working harder? Because he's putting more pieces out from this area onto that, but he's not really working any harder, is he, really?

MN: He doesn't have to carry the piece all the way down.

FS: That's right, but he, in his mind, he's going to handle pieces faster. Of course he is because he's not handling it all this time that it's taking, let's say it takes you a minute to go down there and a minute to come back, that's what they figure it in distance, well heck, if he's just working this end, that's 4 minutes for each chair, now you can cut it down to 2. So, naturally the company says if we're going to save that we can't pay them the same price we were paying before so we're going to put a rate on it and they come over there with their stopwatch and everything and they time the guy and of course the guy gets mad and (laugh) the company tries to keep it as tight as they can and sometimes the guy, sometimes you have people that are honest, nervous, honest and you can't slow them down, they work like fools when they're being timed and then once the guy is gone they can't do it any more. So, the timer has to be somebody that's been out in the world and has seen all this to be able to say well, this guy was giving me 150%, not just 100% of his ability to 150, so he's got to adjust that rate, but if he's not, if he's just graduated out of school or just somebody that says aw hell I get timed, he's going to give this guy a lousy rate, therefore this guy's going to scream all over the place, he going to write up a grievance or even get so mad that he'll quit and this has happened. A lot of people are not very patient. They'll get mad, they'll scream at their steward and if their steward doesn't do something like that, if he's not representing me, well the hell with everything, (laugh) they're gone, ya know. So, you've got to be very careful with people. I know one time I was being timed on a job on a press, 2

men, one on each side of the press. He's got his job, I've got mine, we're assembling a case. Put the pieces in, gotta put screws in it to hold the case up, okay and I told the guy, and I knew he was a nervous fellow and I said, hey, Louis, don't try to go too fast, I said it's going to have to be steady pace. He said okay. So, we went pretty good while we were practicing and the guy came over with the watch, said okay, now let's see what you're doing, and this and that, so we put the case in and he starts timing and ya know, you can't tell a guy, hey slow down, there's a timer right there (laugh). So, we'd do a case and he's going so fast that he ends up waiting for me a little bit, ya know. Well, I'm going steady putting the screws in with the driver and I'll take the case out put it on the floor and he's ready with his other 2 pieces before I take this one out. I said Louis, you can't put that in till I get this up, ya know, okay. Took it out, we did about 5-6 cases and the longer that the guy stayed with the watch, the more I saw this guy going wild like,, ya know. Course I can't watch him all the time. Course with him standing there, it sort of made me go a little faster too, naturally, so I did the screws into the thing, I threw them all in and when I pulled the case out, the thing went all over the place. I said, what happened Louis? He had forgotten to put the screws in. He was so nervous and going so fast that he knew he had to put the pieces in and shove the pieces together but he had forgotten to put the screws in and ya know, I couldn't watch him all the time, (laugh). So I said to the timers, come back some other time, get out of here. (laugh) But, the old man understood well, I got along good with the timer at that time and he said I understand so he went off. So, there was a person that couldn't be timed. They couldn't time study him. He'd go crazy.

MN: What did they ever do?

FS: Well, they eventually came back and restudied with job with another man on there assigned to the press. Then, he was alright, ya know, and then when we had the timing, I brought the guy back and he worked with me, but ya had to keep talking to him ya know. Louis, you forgot to put a screw over there. Louis, you forgot to do this, ya know.

MN: Even when you were working regular?

FS: Yea, he would get nervous after a little while. He was one of those guys that couldn't stay in one place too long, ya know, but.

MN: Did that make people feel more or less pressured when they would have piece work?

FS: Yea, they realized that they were making a little bit more money too, when you're piece work, that's the name of the game, ya know. What they want is when you're on piece work you're going to try to double your pay. Actually, the time study set up is that you're supposed to make about 25% over the normal rate because if you're on day work, you tend to look around once in a while out the window and then come back, ya know, ya don't stay there. When you're on piece work, you don't care what's going on because you're working right along so, it varies as people that can go, can double their rate, they can go 200%, some can go more than that. Some people get so apt at doing their job, it just flies right through. A guy could be doing a 200% job here and another man, another good worker could come over and take his job and do 135-140, that's the best he could do, but this guy here just like magic it just falls into place, you know. But the timing is set up, supposed to be set up so that you can make 25% over the base rate. If you're making 4:00 an hour, it's set up so that you can make 5.00, not 8.00. They're supposed to study it so you can make 5.00, a quarter over the base rate, but, people do get nervous when companies change things around in the shop, they always have the feeling the company's tryign to screw them, plain language, but that's the name of the game. They're thinking, hey they're giving us another shafting now. Now, we've gotta work harder. Not so, not so. Not as a rule. I've been there, I know. But, that's the way we are. You make a change, now they want more production. But, I don't mind giving you more production if I have less to do, or if I have the same amount of work to do. I don't mind, ya know. But, a lot of people they get so frustrated and they get T'd off and they'll even walk out of a plant where they're making a good dollar, ya know, good pay. They'll get so mad that they can't see beyond here.

MN: After the time -----not right when the time is there but just when someone's doing this piece work, piece rate?

FS: No.

MN: Do you think they care more or less about their work, I mean do they care about it more, or do they care about it less when they're going, ya know when they have this...

FS: Well, ya know, I don't know if they, maybe, maybe if they get a rate that's tight sometimes they say well the hell with them, ya know. But ya see, when they get time studied, before, usually before the time study man comes up or the gal that comes up to time study him, you've

had a chance to do a few pieces, ya know, so you pace yourself, you know just how many you can do. I've worked piece work so I know. You take the pieces that's big, well naturally you've gotta figure the fatigue factor that's there and when you first start in the morning you're not as tired as you are at 3:30 in the afternoon, so I always like to have, when I was a foreman, I had them come in and time around 11:00 where a person's had a chance to unwind a little bit and has gotten onto the pace of the day and half of the day, well that's average. Not the first thing in the morning because, well there's some people that don't work very good the first thing in the morning and others go like crazy, so. But anyway, a person knows or has a very good idea of how many pieces he can do, okay. So, the time study person comes along, sets a watch on ya, and then he goes and figures it out. He doesn't give you the rate immediately because they go by 1/100 of a minute and so he comes back and says well this here is worth X amount, well immediately you know if it's good or bad, so right there and then you almost make up your mind, this here is lousy or good, because like I said you had an idea and you say, Jese, I must've been going pretty steady here. If he's giving you a low rate, ya say, I must've been going like crazy here, or did he miss a couple of pieces, ya know. But, you have a time to try this, you have 7 days to try this rate, but ya know, it's pretty hard, there's no jobs in the wood factory that last for 7 days, so you try it for this cutting, and then when another cutting comes around again, you add onto that, see.

MN: Is that a union rule that you have 7 days.

FS: Yea. That's another benefit that we have. If you have a 7 day trial period on each job.

MN: Then you can ask to be retimed?

FS: That's right. Actually you should ask before but see where a lot of people make their mistake is when the time study man comes along and says there's the rate. This is no god damn good, take it back. I want a restudy. Ya know, they should never do that. You should check it out. And now, go at your normal pace because I would venture to say 90% of the people will kind of hold back a little bit, ya know. It's human nature, because they know that the time study man's not going to give you any extra. He's trying to hold it right to what you're giving him. If you give the guy the 100% and the guy is not that familial with the way you work, if he times you at 100%, you get a lousy rate. But, if you're going at your steady pace

all day long, this guy here's giving me 150% or 180% study, so he's going to figure you with that, but, they don't ya know, so anyways you should give it a try, at least the rest of the day then say, hey I can't make that rate. Because when the guy's gone, you start, you're more relaxed. You're not tense any more now. You're more relaxed, you start working at your normal pace and sometimes you'll be surprised how those pieces fly out of there, ya know. Then at the end of the day you've made that rate close. Well, I'd like to get a little more but maybe I can make it. Sometimes you accept it, but if it's way off then now's the time to say, hey, something's wrong, I've tried it and I, but you've got to keep accurate figures so that, you can't sandwich this in with some other job, turn it in at the end of the day and at the end of the day with that sandwiched in, you make the same average as you did yesterday, it don't work.

MN: You should make more than you did on day rate.

FS: That's right, oh yes you should. Even if you do, see, say that I have a job that, say my day rate is 4.00. That's an easy one to figure with and they rated it so I make 5.00, right but right along I've been making 6.00, making 150%. They come over and they time study me on this job and this one particular job, all I can make is a hundred and a quarter. So, and I work at it for 2 hours. Well at the end of this day, when I make up my vouture and I turn it in and I turn it in with the same amount of money that I had yesterday, then they say, his rate's alright but here you are griping about the rate, but you made the same amount of money, so then they said well the other jobs will lose. That means they were too good, see. This one is tight, that one is loose. So, you made the same amount of money, what the hell you bitching about. But, if he turns in the rate, his day's pay and he's 2.00 shy from yesterday, they say well he makes 150 on the others, all he could make on this was 125, maybe we'll give it another shot. Now, they might bring it up to 135, well ya know, now they've given him 10 more incentives to work with, so now maybe he can find another little shortcut to bring it up to that 150, that's the way it works.

MN: Is it just money that gives meaning to the person's work?

FS: Today, I would venture to say yes. Years ago, when I worked on the bench, if the case that I had go through fitting the drawers on and hanging the door and putting the hardware on didn't look where I would buy it myself, I didn't want it to go. See I had pride in my work, yea. I says boy, that thing is crooked over here, sometimes ya know on the press, the

wood is pushed on the floor, they get jammed, kind of thrown off a little bit. Maybe only myself out of 10 people would see it, the other 9 wouldn't. But, if I looked at it and I'd say I wouldn't buy that if I saw it in a store, I wouldn't want it go go, but today, out it goes and sometimes out it goes because management says let it go and that's bad. See, they have these quantity, quantity, not quality, quantity people. They want 300 chairs today, I've got to get that quantity out, get it out. No matter what. When they do that, then they're taking your bread and butter away from you because those pieces will eventually come back or it'll show up somewhere in the sales. Somebody will look at it in the store and say where the hell did that come from, wow, let's not get any more from them. I know right in this town one factory that's what the guy used to do, get out 300 today, everything went. Tomorrow he didn't need it, nothing was any good. So, the people were griping then because they couldn't make their rates. When he wanted 300, you could make 300% to fill his quota per se. But the next day he didn't need that many chairs all you could make was 110 and that's all you could make because he'd find all kinds of faults with them, but the day before everything was good. But, hey. They eventually got rid of this guy.

MN: Did they care about other stuff from the company besides money, like these parties or their friends at work. Is there time to make friends at work?

FS: Well, some do, some make friends at work, but they've all got their own little hangouts. They've all got their priorities. It's like meetings, ya know, they call a meeting and you have a few that'll come. The others have the soap operas, they've got the ballgames, they've got little league, scouts, they've got the American Legion, they've got Veterans of Foreign Wars, they've got, everybody's got something to do. They can't make all the meetings that there are, but how can you fault a person, let's say there was a meeting tonight and one of your daughters was in girlscouts or cubscouts or there's something at school and she says mom you've gotta come to school because I want you to meet my teacher. Are you going to come to the meeting here? You're going to go with your daughter. And how can I fault you for that. Everything today, if you call a meeting and there's always something that's got to back off, because there's so much going on that you double up on meetings. It's like you go to the dentist's office, you'll say you've got an appointment for 10:00 and there's 6 people sitting there for 10:00 meeting, a 10:00 dental appointment (laugh), but a lot of people look forward

to the Christmas party, because they figure well at least we'll get that out of them, we can't get nothing else, but friendship, there's a few people that make friends at the shop, some are great friendships made there. Infact, there's boyfriend and girlfriend, weddings and stuff like that, ya know, it happens, it's life.

MN: Do they, they can't do that, I mean it must be during breaks if they're working on these pieces.

FS: Oh yea, definitely yes,, during breaks and noontime, stuff like that. If you're working piece work or even if you're working day work you don't have time to go visit other people during work hours, you shouldn't anyway, let's put it that way. Sometimes they do a little bit but, but like I said do you have a contract that says it's time to go to work when you have your breaks and you have your designated areas for the type of work that you're doing. If you're working in a paint shop, the other party's working down in the mill room, you can't be meeting half way ----- you've gotta work in your area.

MN: Newspapers and bonus points and things, or dinners, free dinners, things like that.

FS: Well, there's a few companies that have come out with things like that. They tried to have their people work steadier. By that, I mean not to take as much time off. They have bonus plans, but and then some companies frown on bonus plan because they say well hell if the guy works for 90 days steady and then I've got to give him a day off, what have I gained, well you've gained 90 days of work instead of probably 75 because the people that are used to taking time off are going to take it off, but if they've got this little incentive to work for, they might get way up to the 87th day and be sick, I don't mean sick in bed or in the hospital but have a bad headache, or something and say boy 7 more days and I can have a day off or 3 more days and I can have a day off, well god I'll go to work and tough it out. And ya know, sometimes all it takes is a little incentive. Once you get out there, you feel better. So, the companies gain, but a lot of them, they don't want to give any bonuses but it's returned to them in other ways.

MN: I just had one last thing that I wanted to ask you about. That's actually 2 small things. In unions were men and women equally as active.

FS: Oh, at first they weren't. When it first started they weren't that. Yes, women are wonderful, they're hard workers. It's funny, if they believe in something it seems like it

TAPE 2 SIDE B

comes out better through a woman for whatever reason, they do work awfully hard for what they believe in and it seems like more so than the men. Men do a good job, but if you're trying to organize a shop and there's some women there, get the women on your side because they'll organize for you.

MN: Do they ever assume leadership roles?

FS: Oh definitely, yes, oh yes. We have women as presidents of the union, we have them as shop chairpersons, union stewards, union, they're hard workers, they really are.

MN: Since when, since when are they leaders.

FS: Probably the women became active I would say about probably in the last 10 years and they're getting stronger and stronger. I think it's good for the whole union, or anything else that they ever get into.

MN: Because, let's say in the 1940s or 50s, you wouldn't see a woman as a union leader, would you?

FS: No, in the earlier days, I don't know if it was that they felt that they had a job during the day and then at night they had to take care of the family, stay home and get supper ready and wash the dishes while the husband went out, but ya know, they've got equal rights, and I think it's wonderful.

MN: The other thing I wanted to ask you about were, were, and I know that you weren't at Heywood Wakefield at the time but you might have known about it and we've talked about this very briefly, but they did have periods of strikes at the company.

FS: Yes they did, they had some disagreements way back, whatever prompted them but they eventually got it settled, the people backed off at one time, they gave back 9% of what they were asking for which, but see they were so far behind that's what they had to ask for so much to try to catch up, but then I believe they had a 9-week strike which was a hard strike, but the people survived, the company survived. We didn't force them out of anything. They just forced themselves out by sending out their best products to be done by other companies. IF they'd had kept the good stuff there, see here they had the hardest products to be made, see, they didn't send out the things that were like custom made. Anything that was made easy after they ironed out the bugs here, they sent it to somebody else to do it and Heywood



was left with, well like I said there was an experimental shop and ya know it was a big place over here.

MN: But the union would have organized or would have been, if they were dead locked in discussion you would have said well now's the time when you have to consider a strike and then the people vote on it.

FS: That's right, ya see, the union never tells their people to strike. See what brings on a work stoppage is that the company gets stubborn and they say no sometimes to some minor little thing that maybe they could iron out during the year or at the next contract, more prepared, but sometimes somebody, if you have attorneys especially, ya know because that's how they make their money by staying involved, ya know. If you settled everthing right off the bat, hey, ya don't need the attorneys. I say that and that's the truth because I've got 8 shops and I have one, one shop now that uses an attorney. All the others, they, we do all our own negotiating. They don't need no attorneys. We know where to dot the I and cross the T. And we know what we want, it's layman's language. See, in the past, the attorneys wrote up the contracts and ya know you could read an article on page 4 and then read another article on page 13, would be contradicting this one and that's what the attorneys did for us, (laugh) they screwed us up. Ya know, if you went to arbitration and you filed an article such and such, the other article contradicated it. The company would use the other article and there you were, ya know. So, since then, we've had it where when I talk to my people they know what I'm talking about. Before you'd have an attorney talk to you and you don't want to look too, too stupid, so you say yea, oh yea, yea, but you don't know what the hell he said.

MN: And now you draw them up yourself?

FS: No, then the company did, they drew up the contracts, ya know and you'd look and them and you didn't want to look too too crazy, that was before my time, thank god, but that's what happened. There's a lot of contracts that were drawn up by the attorneys and people were interested in the wage, see. They weren't interested in the language. They were interested in the wage. And if you got them another paid holiday, hey, well we did a terrific job and anotehr 5¢ on their pension, that was good. Then, we got the insurance. The company picked up a percentage of the insurance, a little bit more than what we paid, hey we did well, ya know. And vacation...

MN: When you said in layman's language, that means, who writes it now.

FS: Now, we write it.

MN: Oh.

FS: Now we write it, so that we can understand it.

MN: That's a novel idea, to really understand a contract.

FS: Because, ya know if you don't know your contract, shut up, because (laugh), like we said the people are interested in what they're getting for pay and what holidays do I have. They're not really interested in a pension until they're ready to retire. The young people, the pensions are very low in the wood division. Infact, it was very low at Heywoods. If you talk about pension at Heywood's and they'd say I want another penny in my pay, ya know, because the young people and there's more young people that come to meetings too, by the way, than the elderly. The elderly after he's worked all day, he likes to sit down and smoke his pipe and years ago he'd just sit down and listen to the radio, read they're paper and went to bed at 9:00. The young people wanted to get out, they did the voting, so ya, know, they weren't pension minded at all, they were passion minded (laugh) but anyway, the contract is a very, very important document and you've got to know your contract that you've got.

MN: Back for just one second to this Heywood Wakefield strike. I understand there was one in the 50s and then there was a big one in 1960.

FS: In the 60s somewheres yea.

MN: Now you would have probably been aware of that even though you didn't work in the company, right?

FS: We we heard about that there was a strike but ya know at that time, I don't know, I think when they had the one in the 60s, I was a foreman at Thayer furniture, so I wouldn't have got too too involved ya know, hey I was on the other side of the fence at the time and I had to watch my behind too ya know.

MN: When you're a foreman like that, do you tend to sympathize with management?

FS: Well, ya see, I'd worked out in the plants for 20 years before I became a foreman, see, so I knew what the people wanted and you kind of gotta go along with what the company too, they're paying your wages, but I was told once by the office that I was the only guy that ever fought for my people, because I knew how I wanted to be treated and that's the way I

treated my people. Now, if somebody told me that their rate was no good after they'd had a timing and time to study it and the timer said that's it, I would go down and take that guy's place for 3-4 hours and do his job and he's sit down on the bench with my watch timing me and when I got done, I just didn't do it in 15 minutes because anybody can do anything for 15 minutes. I would do it for 3-4 hours and when I got done, I'd say how did I do? and sometimes you'd say I don't know how you did it and other times he'd say well you didn't make it either. I'd say fine. When he told me that he didn't know how I did it, I would tell him, I don't smoke for one thing and I'm not running over to the smoking room every 40 minutes, or every hour. I stayed here and that guy would say okay Fred I understand, okay. The rate's okay. But if I didn't make it, I would go up and tell that timer, hey, you get down and you restudy that job, there's something screwed up here, you screwed up on your study, and he would go down and they told me in the office you're the first guy that's ever done that because the other bosses didn't care.

MN: Did they like that in the office?

FS: Yes, they respected me for that, for working with my people. I could get more out of my people than the other foremans could. If somebody came up to me for an increase in pay, I would say well, I'll check for ya, I knew if they deserved it or not. I would tell them immediately. Infact, I've given people raises before they even asked for it and I got more work out of them. One guy I asked for a raise and the company said no we can't give it to them and I told them yes, let's give it to him because we're gonig to get more production because he can do, he probably will give me 2-3 more cases a day than he's giving me now if we give him this dime raise. Ya know, in those days, that was back in the 60s. And I said for 80¢ a day, you'll be picking up another 5-600 dollars in production. And they said, oh, I don't believe ya. I said just do it. Anyways, lets find out. It proved itself to be true. Because when the guy got that increase, he was so happy that, hey ya know, there's nothing he wouldn't do for me, ya know and I never told him for that dime you've gotta give me more production because hey the guy was happy. A happy worker is a good worker, a better worker, but if you're T'd off, boy, look out.

MN: And so the foreman are really powerful?

FS: The foreman are very powerful, they have a lot of influence over their people. If you're liked, a foreman usually will have, it varies from 10-30 people working under him depending

on the size of the shop and your department.

MN: Most of these plants are pretty similar in how they organize.

FS: That's right, yes. And if you're a good foreman, your people will go out of their way to do work for you and I've always said, there only one of me and let's say, let's take a figure, 15 of your people, now 15 of you people can really give me the shafting, there's only one of me. If I do good by you guys or gals, hey, and it's that what happens ya know. All I have to do is ask my people, hey I need this, they were there.

MN: Would you have meetings with them?

FS: Oh yes, definitely.

MN: How often?

FS: Oh, I'd probably have a meeting at least once a month or if somebody, ya know, you can tell your people, ya know, you come in and you can see if somebody's got something on their mind. As you look at them, you see that today's this guy's a little bit grumpy or there's something bothering him. The best thing to do with that person, don't let it fester, you don't know if its against you or what. So, you go up to that person and say, hey if you get a break come on down to the office, have a smoke or something. Just walk by and tell him that, I'd like to see you down the office when you get a few minutes. And when the guy comes down to the office have him sit down, light up his cigarette if he smokes. What's your problem, listen to him, let him get it off his chest. Maybe something happened at home and maybe you can't do nothing about it but at least he relieves himself by telling you. Sometimes you can see well, sorry to hear that but, the guy will go back to work after he's had his cigarette, he's told somebody what happened and he feels better. But you keep it inside, the rest of the day he's no good, so get it out, let him feel like himself and let him go to work.

MN: That's something I'm just learning now, how important this...

FS: Ya know, like Heywood's. After the union got in there, they changed drastically. They did. They knew their people, they weren't just a number and when the people had to negotiate all the benefits that they got, they treated them like human beings, they didn't just have them wait around all day long and ya know, a lot of things they did to them before there was a union there, they had done or ya know sometimes people got fired and the guy cried and they

took him back and people don't have to do that. You don't have to humiliate yourself like that, ya know, ya don't have to get on your knees to nobody today, or even then they shouldh't have had to but...

MN: What about the supervisors, are they as important as the foreman in terms of the plant workers?

FS: Well, not really, because they're not in contact with the employee that much. If they're in the office, what the hell do they know what's going on out in the plant. Ya know, they get it from the higher up, everything is fed down the line and sometimes they think that they're King Tut, ya know. The come through and everybody's supposed to bow, ya know. Hey, what the hell, they're just another man.

MN: Did people sort of admire the office workers or resent them.

FS: Well I don't think they had too too much to do with them, they really didn't care, they knew who the pay clerk was (laugh), they kinda liked her. They wanted her to stick around, that's where my money's coming from, but the others, a lot of them they didn't even know who the hell they were, ya know, some say Heywood's coming around, they'd start shaking, hey, Heywood's coming around. So what, ya know. It's like years ago when they'd say the priest is coming down. Jesus. No the priest would come in and Hi Father; how are ya? That's the truth ya know. If a priest came in now, I'd say hi Father, sit down.

MN: I'd heard that before too, people would shake when the priest would come in.

FS: Oh my God, hey, not today. Some things have changed ya know for the better. And Heywood's did really change for the better, although a lot of people said that the union forced them out of Gardner. Not so. Heywood's would have been out of Gardner before if they hadn't had a union.

MN: Why?

FS: Because, hey. They didn't know how to manage their company that's why. That's why they went under. They didn't know how to manage it. With the union in there it made them better managers. It woke them up to the fact that they were doing something wrong but too late, maybe if they'd had a union in there in the 20s maybe it might have, but it came in a little too late, well it came in I think it was in 1942 or 3 somewheres in there, but, but ya know ya can't ~~live high~~ live high off the hog all the time, ya know...

MN: They didn't try to squeeze money out of the company that the company didn't have?

FS: Oh no, no, no. Ya see, you've gotta put money back into the business, you can't keep taking it out, you've gotta put some back in there to keep your machinery in proper operating condition. If you don't do that and you have a breakdown, you'll lose a lot of money. And like I said originally the better pieces they were making here, they farmed out somewhere else. They went to Newport Tennessee when they left here ya know, that was in 64 or 5 and that was the talk then that they were going to close this place. They were getting out of sight. But they got organized over there too, they tried to run away from the union and it didn't work. They organized them over there, but, like I said some people were happy. They won't talk about the bad things because you always tend to forget that.

MN: Is that why a lot of people won't talk to me about their union activities?

FS: Yup, that's right.

MN: They see it as the bad days?

FS: Well, I don't know. I don't think they would want to talk about the union or not, ya know. Anything that was done before the union or even after the union got there, there were some things that was done that probably should have never happened but any bad things that happened, they tend to put it in the back of their mind and forget it. They store it there and leave it there, don't shake it up, ya know, just like they say shake it up and it'll smell, (laugh), so, but...

MN: One last question for you. Ya know, with people's leisure time after work. Do the young people today do different things than let's say you would've done or people working in the 50s and 60s would've done.

FS: I don't think so, no. I think young people are all young people. They like to go out and be where there's other people, they don't like to stay by yourself. You like to go out where there's action.

MN: Do they go to any social clubs.

FS: Well, they go to these social clubs per se, like the Eagles, the Elks, the bar rooms, the American Legion, the VFW, they go there because there's pool, liquor and socializing, they got big television sets, they can watch the ball game, they can watch hockey, watch all the sports, ya know. There's other people that they can talk to, they can relate to, but I think

in, well of course when I was young they didn't have TV so (laugh), but we still went around to dances and stuff like that which they do now.

MN: And do they do woodworking hobbies?

FS: No.

MN: They used to though, didn't they make stuff in their house or ...

FS: Yea, some used to do little odd things like that but there's no more of that, not that I know of anyways. People used to whittle a lot, I know of only one guy that whittles now, (laugh), well I don't know, I guess the world's turning too fast. (tape interrupts)

MN: Difference between a chairman and a steward.

FS: The steward is the immediate person on the floor that tries to solve or help solve the problems of the employee within the department. The chairman represents the whole shop, so when there's a grievance that cannot be settled in the department, the chairman gets involved and then the business manager and onto arbitration.

MN: So there's only one chairman.

FS: One chairman yes.

MN: In each company?

FS: That's right, one chair person in each company. And the stewards, well there's supposed to be one in each department to represent each department because your steward should know what's going on in his department. He doesn't know what's going on in another one, but the chairman through the stewards represents the people.